

## INTERVIEW OF ANTONIO M. CAMACHO

by Howard P. Willens

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- Willens: Antonio M. Camacho was a delegate to the First Constitutional Convention and he served subsequently in many governmental and elected offices. He has agreed to be interviewed today. Why don't we begin by your giving us some background about your mother and your father and how it came to be that you found yourself in Saipan?
- Camacho: Thank you, Howard. I came from a very large family. I am the fourth among the five children of Jose and Juana Camacho. I graduated from Mount Carmel High School in 1967. Then I worked for a year with the Trust Territory government. Then I decided to go to college and I went to the University of Guam in 1968. I graduated in 1972 with a bachelor's degree in public administration. After my graduation I worked with the Trust Territory government as a classification specialist in the personnel program. Then I was transferred down to the Northern Marianas to work as the classification specialist, because the Trust Territory at that time was trying to decentralize the system from the headquarters to the districts. But in the meantime, also, there was the Marianas Political Status Commission working on the separation of the government. The Northern Marianas would like to remove itself from the Trust Territory to be the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas. Then the Office of Transition Studies and Planning was created. Then it was Pete A. Tenorio, the former Lt. Governor, who was the Director of that office. He talked me into working temporarily at his office on the personnel program. Then I was given the responsibility to formulate all the programs for the Personnel Administration. So, we contracted out through Hay Associates from Chicago to make sure the duties and responsibilities of the job are put into the compensation programs so we can have a uniform set of classifications. I only worked there about four months. Then there was the election of the new governor between Carlos Camacho and the late Joeten. Camacho won that election and I was transferred back. And then Camacho appointed me to be the Assistant for Administration which embraces overlooking all the departmental levels. And in 1979, I was encouraged to run for election for the Second Legislature. I did run and I was elected as a representative from Precinct 1, that's San Antonio, San Vicente and part of Chalan Piao.
- Siemer: Did you run as a Democrat?
- Camacho: I ran as a Democrat. I was really a Democrat. My parents were from the old Popular Party. When the Popular Party was changed to the Democratic Party, all the families, my brothers and sisters, father and mother, all joined the Democratic Party. No deviation whatsoever to the other one. Then I chaired the Committee on Judiciary and Governmental Operations at that time.
- Willens: What was the name of the Committee?
- Camacho: Judiciary and Governmental. And during my time, David Cahn was there as a consultant to the Legislature. And I really wanted a good counsel. I forgot his name, what was it? He worked for Legal Services then he worked for us as a legal counsel. That working relationship really helped [us] to think more about how to come out with good legislation, good laws. Then I tried to run for the Senate. I lost.
- Willens: That'd be 1981 you ran for the Senate?

- Camacho: Yes, I think so.
- Willens: And you were defeated for the Senate?
- Camacho: Right, I lost that election. Ben Sablan (Ben Pacho), was the Speaker for that new Legislature, so I got hired as a consultant to the Judiciary Committee. Then the following year I did not work for the government. I tried to find ways to establish business and things like that. I started a small store for selling fish. Then politics always comes back, you know, comes back to us. You never go to any family gathering, [but] there's also talk about politics. So I ran in 1987 for the Sixth Legislature as a Democrat. I won. I was given again the same chairmanship, Judiciary and Governmental Operations. That time it was a very good year because we approved the Supreme Court bill. We created the Supreme Court. There was a challenge about the Covenant, the federal District Court, and things like that, but we felt that we needed a Supreme Court to really address our local issues.
- Willens: And was your decision on that point prompted by the litigation relating to Article 12?
- Camacho: No, it wasn't that. Article 12 in those days was not that much of a litigation [problem], but having the federal District Court make a determination about local matters, you know, customary laws, things like that, for me, it's not appropriate for another court to hear a case like that. I really worked hard on that legislation. The Senate introduced that bill. I think it was the Lt. Governor, when he was President of the Senate at that time, who introduced that legislation. But it was only a matter of three or four pages. But what we did was, I called upon all the legal minds on the island to work things out, to give them some ideas of what we want. So, we came up with very comprehensive legislation. Both houses of the Legislature approved that and, with the blessings of the Governor, we have our Supreme Court. Now, the question comes about as to why our decisions of the Supreme Court have to be determined also by the federal District Court which is for me a no-no. If it's a Supreme Court ruling [reviewed] by the U.S. Supreme Court, I think I can understand that, but the ruling of our Supreme Court justices here to be reviewed also by the federal District Court is, for me, a no-no.
- Siemer: Did you mean the federal appellate court?
- Camacho: Yes, the federal appellate court, the Ninth Circuit Court. For me it should be a no-no; it should be all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. I don't know about the technical procedure on those things but, for me, still, if I'm in the Legislature, I'll be arguing on those issues also again.
- Willens: You mentioned that you also had one later term in the Legislature. When was that?
- Camacho: For the Eighth Legislature. I ran as an Independent and I was voted in. I got elected, but I was a minority within the minority, you know. The Democrats at that time were a minority and I was a minority because I was an Independent. Two of us won that election as an Independent.
- Willens: Who was the other?
- Camacho: Jess Mafnas, who went back again to his party, to the Republican Party, last election.
- Willens: We may come back to some of those legislative assignments, but I'd like to hear a little bit about your mother and your father and their history. Were they both born on Saipan?
- Camacho: Yes, they're both born on Saipan. My mom was born in 1923 and my dad was born in 1924, and they're still alive. My dad just came back about a week ago from Honolulu after a triple bypass surgery. But my mom is very active; she's still, for a 73 year old, she's still strong.

- Willens: And you mentioned that both of them were active in the Popular Party after the party was created in the 1950's.
- Camacho: Sure. Way back, they were members of the Popular Party and, you know, the party system long time ago, the Popular Party is like a family group also. If the party decides to raise funds, almost everybody chips in and helps out. And the turn of events when it was in the Democratic Party and nowadays, people seem to hold back and have the leadership work on how to raise funds. I was only about nine years old, ten years old at that time. I helped getting firewood to cook for the party, you know. It's easy on the candidates in those days because the people, the supporters, helped them out. But there's a change now. Actually the candidates are expected to put out the money which is which is for me, how can a candidate really dedicate his time to think about how to do good things when he has to find money also? It's just the opposite. I loved it during those Popular Party days because everybody helped to support the candidates.
- Siemer: So, both your mother's and your father's families had been here in Saipan for a long time?
- Camacho: Sure.
- Siemer: What was your mother's family name?
- Camacho: My mother's family name is Tudela Muna. My grandma's maiden name is Sablan Tudela.
- Willens: Did you father or your mother ever run for office?
- Camacho: My father, when the San Vicente village was still only about ten, thirteen families. Actually my parents also, at least, were like pioneers for the village here in San Vicente. It was Tutura at one time. The old Chamorro name for our place here is Tutura. But then six, seven to ten families moved up here to stay on their farms, and then my parents also moved up. So it's all family, the Tudelas, the Munas, the Cepedas. It's all very nice, you know, to think about those things because you're like a brother or sister when you're in one small group. Everybody takes care of the neighbors. If you are short of salt, you just ask the neighbor: "Can you give me a little bit of salt?" They'll just give it to you. Then the first commissioner was my late grand-uncle, Joaquin Tudela. Tutura at that time was the name of the village. Then the old man thought about having a patron saint for the place. So, San Vicente was, I think, the saint that was accepted by everybody, so that's why we have San Vicente now here. And that started the village. They changed Tutura to San Vicente. Then my late grand-uncle was elected to be the commissioner. Then after his first term instead of saying: "Let's vote for [someone]," he just said to my father, "Jose, you're next in line to be the commissioner." So, everybody voted for my father. It's just like transferring it. Then after my dad's term, my late uncle Prudencio Cabrera was elected commissioner. It's like they're just giving opportunity to all the members [of the family].
- Willens: Was your father ever interested in running for the Municipal Council or the District Legislature?
- Camacho: No, he never did. He just had this commissioner [position] because it seems like a responsibility. Because he was chosen by the elders, he has to take it.
- Willens: As you were growing up, did you understand that your parents wanted to be part of the United States and integrate with Guam?
- Camacho: The Popular Party's issue was the reintegration program, the Northern Marianas to reintegrate with Guam and have one Marianas. The Territorial Party at that time, they wanted the direct approach going all the way with the United States to establish what we

have now, like the Commonwealth. Then that's the political issue. Every time the election comes about, that is the issue. The Popular is for reintegration and the Territorial is for direct relationship.

Willens: What did you think about it as you were graduated from high school and you went to Guam to study further. Did you have any views at the time?

Camacho: I never approve reintegrating with Guam.

Willens: You did not?

Camacho: But I just shut my mouth because that's my parents' objective. But when I went to Guam, I was a freshman student when the Guam people voted not to be with us in the reintegration program. Then we said: "Okay, fine and dandy," and that was my belief also. You just stick to your own government and we just stick to our own government.

Willens: Why did you disagree with your parents on that point?

Camacho: It's not that in total, but my observation personally is that we are used to running the affairs of our government ourselves. And if we reintegrate with Guam, I know the seat of the government will be in Guam because of the population there. And the CNMI people, the Northern Marianas people, will never have a chance to be the governor if we reintegrated with Guam; we would never be a governor. That's one of my strong feelings in those years. I think I was right.

Willens: As I understand you, after you graduated from the University of Guam you came back to Saipan and you worked for the Trust Territory for a while. What was your view about the Marianas Political Status Commission and the negotiations it was engaged in?

Camacho: Well, my general view is that we did not start it very well. This is how the problems we are facing about immigration, about supremacy of the federal government versus the local government [came about]. And we were very young at that time, but we were discussing also that we should really slow down and study the issues slowly and professionally instead of rushing and coming up to the status we have now.

Willens: Did you know any of the members of the Commission personally? For example, Ben Santos or Danny Muna?

Camacho: My uncle Danny Muna is my mom's brother. We always discussed issues, but they are more towards getting the Covenant passed.

Willens: Did you discuss with Mr. Muna issues that the Commission was considering at the time?

Camacho: Actually, it's not that. In fact, I wasn't of age to vote at that time. I was about maybe sixteen years at that time. But we are sensitive, we are following that issue around because we are from the Popular Party or we discussing reintegration. When they decided to get away from the Trust Territory government, that's when I think everybody came together and said, okay, no more reintegration, we just have one package deal, and work on the Covenant.

Willens: Did you think it was a good idea for the Northern Marianas to seek a status that was different from the other districts of the Trust Territory?

Camacho: Oh, yes.

Willens: Or did you think that the Marianas should stay together with all of the other districts?

Camacho: No, because, see, we are used to being away from the others. Because of the military

installation here, we were separated from Ponape, Truk, Marshalls, Palau, you know. We were separate even from Guam. We felt that we are not part of Guam, we are not part of any other area, but we are ourselves. I think the other younger guys my age felt that way also, that we want to get away from any other jurisdiction and be ourselves.

Willens: Did you and some of your contemporaries think that the negotiation should be looking toward something like free association of the kind that Palau and the Marshalls now have with the United States?

Camacho: No, I think actually we have a good deal in the Covenant, but the only thing is that it's not really defined the way we want it defined. There's no definition whatsoever. Just put it there and now it's a million, billion dollar issue. Who gets what, and how much, and things like that.

Willens: When you were working for the Trust Territory did you have any opinion about what the position was of the High Commissioner and the staff of the TTPI with respect to the Northern Marianas and its separate status?

Camacho: When we voted for the Covenant, it's really obvious already because the late Erwin Canham already was appointed to head the Northern Marianas. It's very obvious. Any lay person or any newcomers coming in, they would really know what's going on already. Because the High Commissioner is there, and Canham is down there holding the affairs of the Northern Marianas already.

Willens: Do you think the people of the Northern Marianas were informed about the issues when they were asked to vote on the Covenant?

Camacho: No. I think there's not enough of a debate on that. I know of a very good friend of mine who was very vocal at that time. You know Oscar Rasa? He was raising issues. My friend who was with me in the Second Legislature, Dino Jones, and several other young guys at that time were arguing about the effects of the federal laws here and things like that, but nobody seemed to listen to those concerns.

Willens: What was your judgment when you finally had to make a decision? Did you support the Covenant or did you think it was premature?

Camacho: I did not vote for the Covenant. I was in Oklahoma, at the University of Oklahoma for my graduate studies there.

Willens: You mentioned that you worked briefly for the Office of Transitional Studies and Planning. I've heard a good deal of debate about whether the work that office did was, first, good work, and, second, whether it was implemented by the first administration of Governor Camacho. Do you have any judgment on those questions?

Camacho: It's funny, if you go back to the OTSP studies, they just turned around, away from the plan.

Willens: Who did?

Camacho: The Commonwealth administration. I remembered seeing in the plan of the OTSP that Koblerville would be set as an industrial area.

Willens: Koblerville?

Camacho: Then when the new Marianas Public Land Corporation took control of the distribution of land, Koblerville became a homestead program, village homesteads. And then they diverted the industrial area to Lower Base. I think Koblerville was a good place for the industrial program because there's only one way in and it's all concrete. No trees. No

nothing. And look for other places for the village homesteads. I think the OTSP plan for that area is right, but they're now different. Because if you have a concentrated area for an industrial, commercial complex, warehousing and things like that, that would be a fine idea because of the trade winds not hitting the villages, you know.

Willens: What persuaded you to run for the Convention in 1976?

Camacho: First, I was asked by my peers to run. Then I went back to think about what I did in college, you know, about politics and public administration. I decided I think it would be good place to start. Then I really pity people who are working for the government when they have no protection. Then I decided, I thought, I'm in Personnel. I really want to gauge people by their performance, give them credit if they advance themselves, give them their benefits. If they're lazy, remove them from work and things like that. But at least we have procedures to protect the good workers. Then I think I can insert a provision in the Constitution to make sure that the system at that time we normally call it the merit system really would take hold in government. I was the leading author of that particular section of the Constitution.

Siemer: How did the Popular Party at that time select its candidates for delegate?

Camacho: I think I was drafted in with Maggie Camacho.

Siemer: Are you related? Is your family related to her husband's family?

Camacho: Right. I think we were the two youngest from [the] San Vicente delegation.

Siemer: Do you remember who came to you to persuade you to do this?

Camacho: To run? I really don't know. It was long time ago. But I knew that my name was already there in the slate for the Con-Con because the law was very strict then. Political parties cannot really say: "Viva Popular Party," "Viva the Territorial Party" when you are campaigning for the Constitutional Convention. But you can feel the minute you see a person there, he's a Popular Party member and you see another person from the other side, that's a Territorial Party member, you know. And it's the party system, right there!

Siemer: How did the campaigning actually go on back in those days? What did you do as a delegate to get elected.

Camacho: I was assigned only to be there, take my seat as a candidate, and the master of ceremony would do all the programs, and only when you're called upon to speak on your plans, your background, that's the time when you have to stand and go to the forum and speak. In those days, the campaigns were very good. It's like putting on a big party, a big fandango. I don't feel that I spent too much money as a candidate.

Siemer: And it was sponsored primarily by the parties, the candidates didn't have to spend money for the parties?

Camacho: Well, you contribute a little but not like today's kind of campaign when they ask you to put out \$5,000 or \$6,000 to be a candidate.

Siemer: In that election, the Territorial Party's candidates did better than the Popular Party, although in the elections up to that point the Popular Party had won most of the seats on the Municipal Council and District Legislature. What was it about the Constitutional Convention election that allowed the Territorial Party to succeed?

Camacho: The minute you said there's no politics involved, people look for their roots. They don't know me that well, except for my mother and my father and my names. But the minute

that you mention that your grandmother is Sablan Tudela, the minute that you mention that your father is Palacios Camacho, people know you.

Willens: Was he related to Dr. Palacios?

Camacho: My dad is about second cousin to Dr. Palacios. So, my family's all in there. I am a Sablan, I am a Camacho, I am a Tudela, I'm a Muna, I'm a Palacios, you know. So, I don't have to work hard. But when it's politics, when it's political parties going around, you have to work hard because some of the older generations, even though you are a nephew, they will vote for their party. That's why you have to break that and approach them to at least give you a thought when they're going to vote.

Siemer: Were you also related to Dr. Carlos Camacho?

Camacho: Sure.

Siemer: Is he a cousin?

Camacho: My dad's second cousin also.

Siemer: After you were elected, did the Popular Party delegates get together before the Convention to talk about what they were going to do?

Camacho: Sure.

Siemer: Who was the head of the Popular Party delegation?

Camacho: Was it Dr. Palacios? Dr. Palacios was the key man there and former Governor Carlos Camacho. I think they were the two key persons there.

Siemer: Did Dr. Camacho campaign actively to become President of the Convention?

Camacho: Here? Now?

Siemer: No, in the First Con-Con?

Camacho: No, I think he didn't campaign for that.

Siemer: Who did campaign at the time?

Camacho: I would sense that the late Dr. Palacios is trying to be the [leader], and we tried to endorse him. But you know how you can see that the distribution [of the votes] already [has determined the result].

Siemer: How about the selection of a committee? You served on the Governmental Institutions Committee. Did you select that committee or were you selected?

Camacho: I selected that committee because I'm more attuned to the governmental system already, so that's why I wanted to make sure that the civil service provision was there, that's why I make that selection as a member of that committee. Because if I took other committee assignments, I know that my civil service program would be out of the picture in that Constitutional Convention.

Siemer: Let me ask you about that. This is delegate proposal No. 6 which you submitted very early on.

Camacho: Oh.

Siemer: Is that the proposal that you recall about the civil service commission?

Camacho: Yes. You got it.

- Siemer: That was a very successful proposal, which resulted in a constitutional provision with respect to civil service.
- Camacho: Yes.
- Siemer: When you made this proposal No. 6, did you think about having other delegates sign on with you and support that?
- Camacho: No, I never thought about that but I know that they would fear the workers.
- Siemer: Why is that?
- Camacho: Because I was talking to the employees in government that I want to make sure that they are protected and not at the whims of the big boss, you know. And they know that provision is forthcoming. I talked to employees about their feeling about why they're getting scared on their job and things like that.
- Siemer: Was there a concern among the government employees who were working for the Trust Territory that once the new government was set up that they wouldn't have jobs?
- Camacho: Yes. There were concerns, but I think Canham at that time was working hard on the transition of workers that until the Trust Territory ceased to exist, when our people who were working for the Trust Territory would have no job, but as long as the Trust Territory government exists they will still be given priority to remain on the job.
- Siemer: Now, in the Governmental Institutions Committee when you discussed the Executive Branch, some people thought that the Civil Service should be left up to the governor, and I wonder what you recall about the debate on that?
- Camacho: The debate. They wanted to remove that provision because they said it's not a constitutional issue. Then I responded to them. Actually it is like the pendulum among all the members of the Committee. Then I told them in the absence of any protection for the workers, I don't think anybody would come up with a direction on how the civil service would work. But the minute we put a provision in the Constitution [saying that] the Legislature and the Governor should really come up with a provision, then this will force them to do something about it. That's how they really backed me up and supported my plan to include that in the [Constitution].
- Siemer: And that, in fact, happened in the Camacho Administration, didn't it? The Civil Service Commission got set up. A civil service program got put in place. Was that successful immediately after the Constitutional Convention, the way the Civil Service got set up? Was it what you expected?
- Camacho: No, it wasn't, because the Legislature has to enact how to appoint the members of the Commission, you know, non-partisan type of people. I think it took the First Legislature almost until the end of their term to come up with the legislation. Then, after that I think it was a political rivalry again between, I think, Jess Mafnas, who was appointed as Personnel Officer, and the Camacho Administration. Then I think they even went to court on that. But I think it's more a break-even decision, some arguments put out by Camacho were approved by the court so I think that there was an amendment in the law regarding the Civil Service Commission. But that's why I wanted to be on that Governmental [Institutions] Committee, because I want that provision there.
- Siemer: Now once the provision was agreed to by the Committee and reported out to the floor, you spoke again in the Committee of the Whole with respect to that. Do you remember that and what the debate was about there?



- Camacho: No, I think there was almost no debate. I just spoke asking them to vote for that provision and it's almost by a unanimous vote.
- Siemer: There never was any amendment to it?
- Camacho: I don't think there was any amendment because I try to [put in] language I think I worked with. What was the name of the [consultant]?
- Siemer: Mr. Mantel?
- Camacho: Howard Mantel. He worked with me. I thought I put enough teeth in that provision. But now I know it did not have enough teeth. But I'm proud that at least one good section in the Constitution is still working and directing, and that the Legislature's knowing what to do and what not to do.
- Siemer: Let me ask about another provision that your committee dealt with. A few days into the Convention, Benjamin Manglona made a speech in which he, on behalf of the Rota and Tinian delegates, asked for a governmental structure that included three lieutenant governors.
- Camacho: Right.
- Siemer: And that came to your committee. What was your position on that?
- Camacho: My position, I just laughed and said, you can give them any names, I don't care as long as we have a small government and the central government has the power. You know, names, it's only names. Lieutenant Governor and Mayor, if they have the same functions, it's the same thing. That's my discussion within the group. But said, "Let's make it more sacred: the term of Lieutenant Governor has to be with the central government." But at that time, I think I was indifferent to whatever title you give the Mayor.
- Siemer: You said you were a proponent of the central government. What was your view about the proposal made by Rota and Tinian for powers to be given to the mayor?
- Camacho: I just don't believe it. I don't agree with that. Personally, when the Second Constitutional Convention approved giving the Rota and Tinian mayors more power, the next day I said to myself, why not give also Saipan and make it uniform, you know?. Why not give Saipan also certain executive functions. [The] Saipan [mayor] is only a figurehead.
- Siemer: When the debate began to focus on the delivery of public services, there was a great deal of discussion by the people from Rota and Tinian about the quality of the public services that they got. What was your view about that back then in 1976?
- Camacho: The delivery of public services; the feeling of Rota and Tinian at that time was that the central government is not giving them proper attention.
- Siemer: Did you think that was right back then?
- Camacho: No, not really. I was in the Personnel Department. Any training programs we had, we always invited them to send employees. But the problem there is that [when] you're in a small community you don't force your workers to really work and deliver services to the people because they're all relatives. That's why they felt that they are not being given enough to deliver the services, but I don't know why they're blaming the central government when it's them who are calling the shots down there.
- Siemer: That's what was always unclear about why people on Rota and Tinian believed that if there were inequities under the Trust Territory, those would continue when the Marianas was governing itself and there was no more U.S. administration. Was there a particular

fear that the Saipanese who were in the Trust Territory government would be the people who were in the Commonwealth government?

Camacho: No, I don't think so.

Camacho: If you look at the people of Saipan, they never mention about working in Tinian or working in Rota. I don't know why they had that fear that the people of Saipan would go to Rota and take over the jobs and [the same] in Tinian. It's hard to know anybody who would be volunteering to go to Rota and Tinian.

Siemer: Yet, during the Convention that view was voiced time and time again that somehow the Saipanese would take over, and the Rota and Tinian delegates felt they needed some protection against that.

Camacho: That's right. If I'm not mistaken, I remember Herman Q. Guerrero was almost shouting and saying, "It's unfounded," you know. I think, if I'm not mistaken, Herman Q. Guerrero was arguing with Esteven King at that time. I mean it's almost related to the one you're hearing of now, that's it almost unfounded, that we're going to take the jobs from Tinian and Rota.

Siemer: There was some discussion with respect to the large government-small government [issue], about the pay levels for the governor and legislators. What was your position on that?

Camacho: No. I supported the small amount of money given to the elected members because I don't want them to make sure it's an employment agency. I supported an \$8,000 salary for the legislators and \$20,000 for the governor. I really supported that.

Siemer: Back then you were concerned about the level of government employment and how many people would be employed by the government?

Camacho: Sure, because see if you trim that fat, you know, you can hire another. And another thing, the governor's earning about almost \$80,000 now. See, if you trim that fat, you can hire three more people or reprogram that money and put it in the medical referral [program].

Siemer: One of the debates that occurred in your committee was about how the Legislature would function and whether there was a need for a code of ethics for the Legislature. Do you remember that discussion?

Camacho: Sure. Well, I think there's a section about the code of ethics in the Constitution. The first Constitution had a proposal, and the Legislature [is] mandated to come out with an ethics law. But it seems that it's not working. The way the Governor is saying about ethics; I don't know, it's not going to work.

Siemer: I was going to ask you about that, what your view was in subsequent legislatures about how that worked?

Camacho: I think that during our time, while coming out with the proposal of ethics, that what we envisioned and today's legislation are totally different. I think, the law here is you have to do your financial report and everything; but the way I envisioned that ethics law should be is [that] you should have no employment, you cannot hire your first cousin, to get away from nepotism, you know, things like that. But it seems they expanded that law also to include here your financial statement. It's not bad, but the first time around during those days we are trying to get away from protecting our own family and our own class, things like that.

Siemer: There's a considerable discussion about whether there should be detailed ethical rules in the Constitution or whether that should be left to the Legislature; and, as you recall, the

decision was to leave it to the Legislature. Looking back, do you think that was a wise decision?

Camacho: I don't think so. It should be in the Constitution, what to put out. We can delegate to the Legislature certain other [areas] that we didn't cover to make it [complete], but at least we should itemize what should be in the ethics [laws] so that we cannot have the kind of ethics we have now.

Siemer: When the Committee met, the Government Institutions Committee had two of the most difficult tasks. One was the Legislature and one was the Executive Branch, and it took your Committee a long time to report those out. When the Committee finally did report out the Executive Branch proposal, were most of the members satisfied with what the Committee proposed?

Camacho: Generally speaking, yes, because my group are all mostly college graduates and they are looking at the federal government level on the power of the Executive Branch and how the departments work. So, I think a good input was provided by the members, and discussed thoroughly. The only situation that came about, I think, was how [to select] the Washington Representative. Was it's going to be an appointed position or it's going to be an elected one? How many terms? Because we don't know is he our legislator [in the U.S.] or what?

Siemer: What was your position on that?

Camacho: My position at that time was to make it an appointed one.

Siemer: So, he'd be like an ambassador, somebody the Governor appointed.

Camacho: Right. So, it's an ambassadorial position. And I still maintain that.

Siemer: There are some difficulties when the Washington Rep is of a different political party and may have different views than the governor. It's a little confusing.

Camacho: That's what's happening now.

Siemer: It's confusing to people in Washington as to who speaks for whom.

Camacho: Right. That's what's happening now. That's why I think, why I still maintain, that I was right a long time ago that I want that as an appointed position.

Siemer: Do you remember the discussion about who should control the government reorganization? There were some people who thought that any reorganization of the Executive Branch should be controlled by the legislature and there were some people who thought that ought to be the governor's prerogative, that he should be able to reorganize.

Camacho: I think what happened with that is that it's only a matter of trying to complement each other on the proposal. But all along I thought it's for both houses to approve any reorganization, until Howard was saying that if one house can disapprove and one can approve, the governor has it.

Siemer: Because there actually wasn't that much reorganization during the terms you served in the legislature, was there?

Camacho: I think it never happened for reorganization, only that the legislature's creating agencies. And now that we found out the real problem, if we have the Third Constitutional Convention, I hope that these delegates would really look into the kind of power that the governor has because I think both houses have to approve any reorganization.

- Siemer: One of the articles that you voted against was the eligibility-to-vote article. Do you remember why you voted against that?
- Camacho: No, I think it's candidacy of age 25 in that argument.
- Siemer: Oh, it was the age limit that you were concerned about?
- Camacho: I think I argued why not have an 18-year old be a candidate when you say he's already mature, he can go to war, and you can draft the guy. That's why I argued. I think I argued why only a 25 year-old can be a candidate to elective office. And why the governor should be a 35 year-old and not at 18?
- Siemer: It's interesting because now people are thinking about putting those age limits up even farther.
- Camacho: No. You mean to tell me that you want me to go to war knowing my responsibility as a U.S. citizen, knowing that I'm going to die, and when it comes to making that decision I cannot be a candidate for elective office at the age of 18? That's my argument, and I still stand on that. If you trust me to vote for you, why can't you trust me to be a candidate?
- Siemer: When the issues about the public lands came to the floor of the Convention did you generally agree with the provisions?
- Camacho: I agree with Dr. Palacios. I still maintain that. What I'm telling people here now about the Article 12 provision: the Article 12 provision is good. It's only us, we are doing it differently.
- Siemer: What do you mean by that?
- Camacho: If you're a landowner and I'm going to be the buyer, the middle man is actually the problem. They try to buy the land from you so that he can sell it to me and they know they cannot do that. If I am the middle man, I would just say, okay, give me the finder's fee. There's the land there. The owner's willing to sell the land for that much. But you have to give me the finder's fee.
- Siemer: But at the time, when there were limitations on sales to persons who were not of Northern Marianas descent, how did you think it was going to work if there was a Northern Marianas descent landowner, a Northern Marianas descent middleman, and a Northern Marianas descent purchaser?
- Camacho: If it's Northern Marianas descent they can sell, but the problem is when the investor is a foreigner. And the middle man is saying to himself that I can buy this land for a smaller amount, but I don't have the money. Taking the money from here, buying the land, then selling it back to the person at the higher amount. In Saipan everybody talks and then sometimes the buyer talks about it that he got shortchanged by the middleman and things like that. That's actually what started things up. But, I do believe in land holdings. I would like to see if three generations down, the owner passed away, his great grandchildren can get back the land. I really believe in that. That's why I admired Dr. Palacios for having that thought put into the provision in the Constitution.
- Siemer: What is your view about the homestead provisions? Did you support those?
- Camacho: Regarding what provisions?
- Siemer: One of the provisions on homesteads was a restriction against selling the homestead for ten years.

- Camacho: For me, I don't want anyone selling their homesteads if there's a clause that they cannot sell their land. That's why the government is giving you the land to build a house. And you mean to tell me that I give it to you and then you sell it? And then you are going to go again and ask for [another homestead]; that's not [what was intended]. I believe that. I know it's American jurisprudence that when it's yours, you can do what you want. But it's really down to when I was brought up, that's my feeling.
- Siemer: Did you think at that time that all of the public land should be disposed of through the homestead program?
- Camacho: No, not necessarily. At least the government should have come up with some ideas how to promote the land. But our problem really is I want to see a comprehensive master plan. I was asking this for so many years and I wasn't given any master plan.
- Siemer: You mean when you were in the Legislature?
- Camacho: I asked for a road plan for Saipan in the Eighth Legislature. I was given the road plan [from] the Navy's time. These roads are no longer in existence, it's closed. And we don't have a master plan for the sewer system. How can you start giving out homestead lands when you don't know where the sewer lines will go, where the water lines will go. They just issue the homestead and let the developers yell at the legislators to provide monies for the water, and power, and the sewer. I saw in the States that any developer that opens up a town, they already have there the sewer, and everything's ready there, just move in. But not here. Right now we're now talking about that problem of our water. Fifteen years down the line, the water will smell terrible because there's no sewer lines, only septic tanks. Our water lines will be contaminated.
- Siemer: How about the discussion of how often the Constitution should be amended or how it should be amended. Do you recall what your position was on that?
- Camacho: I think it wasn't given a debate on that.
- Siemer: One of the things that the First Constitutional Convention allowed was amendment of the Constitution essentially by the Legislature. The Legislature could pass an initiative and put it on the ballot. What was your view about that back then? Did you think that was a good idea?
- Camacho: Well, for me it's a good idea. But I accepted that when there's also a popular initiative from the people that can come out with a petition to remove a section of the law. I think everybody's contributing, and I agree. Like the Legislature can prepare an initiative to put on the ballot for the people to decide about that. But the only problem is there's not enough education of the good and bad things about the initiative.
- Siemer: You mean when the Legislature proposes one?
- Camacho: Right. There's no [public education], and I don't know whether it's only a game people play that they wait until almost the last day when people don't have time to scream about public education on the initiative.
- Willens: We've also understood that the experience here is that people tend to vote affirmatively for any proposal that's put before them on the assumption that if it's come from the Legislature or from a constitutional convention it must be a good idea. It that your assessment of what's happening?
- Camacho: Yes, that's my feeling. I think that's 100 percent true. Most of the initiatives will be voted upon favorably. But that's what I'm saying; it's only a game we play on the calendar. Election is a month away, well, let's pass this initiative next week so we can dispose of that

and the people don't have time to [oppose it]. But if we have a really strict timing set for the initiatives and designate a responsible agency to go out and educate the people about the initiative, then I think we're going to have a good system, a good law.

Willens: The timing problem is one that could be addressed as you say. Some people have pointed out that the 1985 Convention produced 45 separate amendments. Even if you had enough time, it would be difficult to educate the people about each and every one of those amendments.

Camacho: Some people were telling me they just voted on certain amendments in the Constitution and directly just stuffed it in the box because they're tired of checking the ballot whether it's for or against.

Willens: Well, to some extent it may be that those votes were considered as affirmative votes even if the voter did not mark a box yes or no.

Camacho: That, I don't know. But I heard some people, it's a very real concern about limiting the number of amendments; the elder people get tired standing and things like that. They just ask the poll watchers: "What's this?" "That's the amendment to the constitution, the left is no and the right is yes." So, maybe the old people just voted yes to [get finished]. But the last amendments, it's just too much really. Too much.

Siemer: At one point at the end of the Constitutional Convention, some of the delegates from Rota and Tinian walked out and ultimately refused to sign the Constitution. Was there any discussion in your Governmental Institutions Committee as you considered the Legislative Branch issues and the Executive Branch issues that the delegates from Rota and Tinian might walk out if they didn't get what they wanted?

Camacho: No. I think they held that very closely among themselves. We never knew that. But I think what prompted them to walk out is not giving the title of Lieutenant Governor for the mayor of Rota and Tinian. I think those were the issues, because we did not change our position.

Siemer: There were a series of things having to do with the Lieutenant Governor: title, the powers of local government, and ultimately when they did walk out it was right after the vote that decreased the size of the legislature down to 12, 1, 1 one delegate from Rota, one from Tinian. What do you recall about the debate as to whether Rota should have two delegates or one delegate or three delegates?

Camacho: They wanted more, but the compromise came up with the three- three-three in the Senate. Because we wanted it two-two-two. But I think that was the compromise we put out, "Okay, let's move it up to the Senate and give three-three-three to the Senate and still one-one [Rota and Tinian] in the House." Because we argued on the one vote in the House.

Siemer: Do you think people appreciated back then how important the power was that you were giving Rota and Tinian in the Senate?

Camacho: No. We never encountered that during the First Legislature, up to the Fifth, up to the Sixth, we never encountered problems about the Senate structure. Because they go by politics, by the political parties: who's going to be President of the Senate, who's going to be the vice, who's going to be [in what position]. I think from the Sixth Legislature up, that is when the power struggle came about. Let's go island-by-island.

Siemer: What was it that crystallized that island-by-island attitude?

Camacho: I think it started with the argument, you know, with Senator Inos and Senator Mafnas.

Because they're two representing the two other islands. Mafnas is representing Tinian and Inos is from Rota. And it started with a coup, you know, shifting leadership. That's when they felt Rota and Tinian should gang up. But for me, it's not fair if you do that. You have to look at the program, at the project that the Legislature is mandated to do. And because of that I even thought about, if they are holding hostage the development of Saipan because they don't want to pass the budget in the Senate, why don't they start a Constitutional Convention and come out with empowering the mayor of Saipan to utilize taxes that's been generated in Saipan so that we don't delay developments in Saipan. If we do that, I think no one in the Senate can say let's not pass the budget. I know they won't pass the budget so that we don't do the assessment here.

Willens: Well, you did serve in the Legislature in three very different periods of time in the Second Legislature, and then in the Sixth when you were in the Senate, and when you were in the Eighth. We've heard a good deal about the difficulty of the Legislative Branch working with the Executive Branch and also criticism of the power that Rota and Tinian have in the Senate. What is your assessment now, looking back on your own legislative years, as to the difficulties of the Legislature working with the Executive Branch?

Camacho: It was the case when Carlos Camacho was the Governor, the First Legislature was all Republican. They gave the Camacho Administration a hard time. In the Second Legislature, the House was controlled by the Democrats, the Senate was Republican. Then we change personalities, we deal with the Senate, so the concentration is not with the administration anymore, it's between both houses. So, Camacho's last two years were kind of smooth.

Willens: Was he able to get more of his confirmations approved and his legislation enacted during this second two-year period?

Camacho: Yes. But I think there's nobody to appoint for confirmation because the directorships that he got in the first year were for four years. But the conflict was between the two houses. The Senate was having problems with their financing; they were coming down to the House to help build them up and things like that. That changed the concentration from the administration only to the two houses.

Willens Well, when the houses are controlled by different parties as they were then. . .

Camacho: No. It turned out that in the Eighth Legislature Governor Larry Guerrero had a problem with his own group in the House of Representatives. They even talked about trying to impeach him. As time goes on, you cannot anticipate whether the ball will be hit to left field or whether the ball will be hit to right field.

Willens: Well, I guess the question for the Constitutional Convention is whether the problems that have developed here over the past nearly 20 years are problems with the institutions, which can be fixed, or are they problems that result from personalities or partisanship, or whatever?

Camacho: Personalities. It's only personalities, you know, Howard.

Willens: So, your view is that the institutions can be made to work if the right people are present.

Camacho: Yes. The Constitution we have is very workable. It's only the players.

Siemer: Were there other things about the First Constitutional Convention that you remember clearly that we should include as part of the record?

Camacho: No. I think we did a good job on that one. I was proud to be a member of the First Constitutional Convention, to be honest.

Siemer: Did you work at all on the education campaign after the Constitutional Convention was over?

Camacho: Yes. I was appointed to be a member of the Educational Task Force in order for us to put that on the ballot for the people to act on.

Siemer: How did the Task Force go about doing it's work?

Camacho: We went to the radio. I think it was only WUSZ at that time on television. We had Dr. Palacios, because he was our chairman for the Task Force, on television. We traveled to Tinian and we went from one office to the other office.

Siemer: In the government offices?

Camacho: At that time there was the resident representative; Erwin Canham was the representative. Of course we asked Canham to give us the blessing so that we can go down to Rota and Tinian and we can really feel what the people [want]. We can tell them that this is our Constitution, the Constitution will work this way, so vote on it. It was a good educational program we put out.

Siemer: Was there concern on the Task Force that the government workers didn't support the Constitution, that they were afraid of their jobs?

Camacho: We showed them that the Constitution would only take effect if you people approve of the Constitution.

Siemer: Now the First Constitutional Convention did away with municipal councils. How were all of those workers and people who were associated with the municipal councils, how were they fed into the system?

Camacho: Because I was the Personnel Officer at that time, I went up to all the municipal government levels. I asked them what are they doing. Give me all the descriptions of what you are doing so I can put that in the classification and compare work. So when you take a mechanic, for instance an auto mechanic, and you put them someplace else, they would not function right. So, that's what I did.

Siemer: What year was this that you did this work?

Camacho: Right after the Constitutional Convention.

Siemer: Were you still working for OTSP at the time?

Camacho: OTSP, no, I was only there about four months, just to come out with a comprehensive new personnel plan, personnel program. It was a very tedious work, you know.

Siemer: So, you interviewed everybody?

Camacho: Yes. Everyone I have to interview. Then I go to the mayor or the supervisor. What are the duties this guy [is doing]? Some are just humble, they don't elaborate on what they're doing so I have to get second-hand information from the supervisor or from the Mayor. Is this the work of this guy? I prepared the forms. Then I have them sign that he's doing that. I call in the supervisor or the Mayor to approve whether really the guy is doing that. Then after that, I compile [the forms] and then I went to the Personnel Office and sort things out and make a comparative new project on that with what the workers in the various government [offices] are doing. So, that's when I return the personnel action and I just talk to the guy. If this government, the new government, comes about, you will go to that department.

Siemer: So, you had a plan so everybody knew that there was a job for them?



- Camacho: Yes, right.
- Siemer: How long did it take you to get all that done?
- Camacho: Right after the Constitutional Convention ended. I know it's going to pass. I was assigned by Canham to start working, so I went first to Saipan municipal government offices and then I fly to Rota, fly to Tinian.
- Siemer: How long did it take you to get it all done?
- Camacho: Well, I had about three assistants. Within about four months we finished.
- Siemer: Who worked with you on that?
- Camacho: Some of my staff in the Personnel [Office]. And I took one guy from Public Works who's working on personnel matters because he has already some background of how to do it.
- Siemer: Was that successful? Were all the municipal employees absorbed into the Commonwealth government?
- Camacho: Everybody. Everybody was absorbed.
- Siemer: Was it a smooth transition?
- Camacho: It was. It was a smooth transition until the Second Con-Con came about again.
- Willens: On that point, I've heard it said that the first administration was not well-prepared in that they had people in place that didn't know how to administer. I gather that you disagree with that?
- Camacho: I disagree with that. I don't know about the higher ups, appointed positions. I did not work with that because those are exempted. I care for the people in the down-the-line brackets because that's my assignment from Canham the carpenters, the mechanics, the clerks, the secretaries. Those people would be in the Executive Branch the minute the transition takes effect.
- Siemer: How was Mr. Canham to work for?
- Camacho: He's a good guy. I liked him. He showed understanding.
- Willens: How about District Administrator Ada who did have executive responsibilities under the TTPI and then became the Lieutenant Governor under Governor Camacho. Did you look at the employees of the district governments as well as the municipal councils?
- Camacho: The minute we have this new government when Carlos Camacho came as Governor, there's no employees in the municipal government anymore. We did that before. It's [a] week before Carlos took over, everybody was in there already.
- Willens: And did Lieutenant Governor Ada play a role in this process?
- Camacho: He was the assistant to Canham at that time, so he knew what was happening. And it's a good combination for the Legislature and me at that time, because Ada knew what's going on, this continuity.
- Willens: Did they get along well, so far as you know?
- Camacho: I don't know if it's superficial but I think they worked together.
- Siemer: You said that at some point in the 1980's you went back to school, to graduate school?
- Camacho: In 1984.
- Siemer: Why did you decide to do that?

- Camacho: To get my master's degree.
- Siemer: And where did you go?
- Camacho: I went to OU, University of Oklahoma.
- Siemer: How long were you there?
- Camacho: One and a half years because I had all my graduate credits from the University of Guam transferred there.
- Siemer: And what did you get your master's degree in?
- Camacho: I got my masters in public administration.
- Willens: What are you doing now?
- Camacho: I have only my own business now.
- Willens: You have your own business?
- Camacho: I'm in construction [here working] on the apartments.
- Willens: So you're building and supervising projects?
- Camacho: My construction [company] built this apartment. I got a quotation when I was planning to build this one. They gave me about \$700,000 to finish. Then I said, no, I cannot afford that; so, I told my workers we've got to do it ourselves. I ended up finishing for about \$300,000, \$350,000. It's big savings.
- Willens: We are very appreciative of your time and we remember you and the First Constitutional Convention delegates very, very fondly. Thank you for your help.